

STATE PLANNING PROJECT ON THE UNINSURED

REPORT ON MICHIGAN'S HEALTH CARE LISTENING TOUR

As part of the planning process for the Michigan State Planning Project for the Uninsured, a Health Care Listening Tour was conducted. The Health Care Listening Tour gave Michigan residents an opportunity to voice their concerns about the impact that lack of health insurance is having on themselves and their communities. The Department of Community Health partnered with local organizations in each community that hosted a town hall meeting. Local partners included hospitals, local Chambers of Commerce, local health departments, Community Mental Health, unions, local health coalitions, and many others. The Department of Community Health extends its appreciation to the many partners who helped plan and sponsor these events.

The Health Care Listening Tour was held pursuant to a grant from the federal government to develop a plan that puts forth a set of realistic strategies and viable options that will lead to health insurance coverage for all Michigan residents.

The following questions were asked at each town hall meeting on the Listening Tour:

- 1) Who are the uninsured in your community?
- 2) Why are they uninsured?
- 3) Who should be the "players" in covering the uninsured?
- 4) Who should pay for health insurance?
- 5) How has the issue of the lack of health insurance affected your community?
- 6) What is happening in your community to address or assist those without health insurance?

Town Hall Meetings for the Health Care Listening Tour were held in the following locations starting September 20 and finishing December 14. The number of attendees at each event is listed.

- Flint – 125+
- Gaylord - 13
- Detroit – 200+
- Hillsdale - 28
- Bad Axe - 15
- Kalamazoo - 30
- Sault Ste. Marie - 17
- Marquette - 14
- Iron Mountain - 46
- Grand Rapids - 65
- Macomb - 50

Over 600 people attended the town hall meetings. Recurrent themes were as follows:

- It is imperative that we do something about the health care crisis. The current system often results in poor health for the uninsured, it stifles entrepreneurship, makes people choose between food and health care, causes bankruptcies, keeps people who want to work from doing so because they may lose Medicaid, stops small business start-ups, causes people to give up small businesses and take jobs that provide insurance, and forces employers to eliminate health care benefits for their employees which may cause employees to seek employment elsewhere.
- Health care must be available for all.
- All Michigan residents should have access to a basic array of preventive care, screenings, primary health care services, disease management and hospitalization.
- It is particularly critical that preventive care be provided to all Michigan residents since primary prevention saves money, in addition to enhancing the quality of life for Michigan's residents.

- It is financially advantageous to manage chronic disease in Michigan to prevent or at least limit episodes of critical illness.
- The uninsured and many employers, especially small businesses, are unable to afford the cost of health insurance. COBRA is too expensive to be an option for most people who lose their jobs.
- Most people who are uninsured have jobs
- It is essential that we reduce the administrative expenses of health insurance and use those funds to provide health care to Michigan's uninsured.
- The patchwork of insurance and coverage programs we have is expensive and not meeting the needs of too many of Michigan's residents.
- Michigan residents must make wiser life style choices to reduce health care costs.
- Those without insurance don't receive the care they need in a timely fashion so they are sicker and their care is more costly when they do receive care.
- Lack of dental, mental health and substance abuse care and treatment leads to greater health care expenses in the long-run.
- It is difficult, if not impossible, for the low-income and uninsured to see specialists, especially in rural areas.
- Prescription drug coverage is a concern that may get worse if the pharmaceutical companies end their assistance programs due to implementation of Medicare Part D.
- Everyone should contribute toward the cost of health insurance for all residents; businesses and individuals should all pay their fair share based on ability to pay.
- Special populations of the uninsured were discussed including: young adults, women 55 to 64 many of whom are caregivers, part time workers, early retirees, health care workers, farmers, small business owners and employees, divorced individuals, low wage earners, substitute teachers, and paraprofessionals. It was stated that all of these individuals need health insurance coverage but too many individuals in each category are currently uninsured.

1/26/06